

Coulthard is Bullish

■ by JAMES MURRAY

DAVID COULTHARD faces an anxious wait before being told this week whether he has done enough to land a career-saving drive with the new Red Bull Racing team.

Coulthard, who was dumped by McLaren-Mercedes in favour of Colombian ace Juan Pablo Montoya, had a two-day test last week for the team who took over Jaguar.

Call

He is now sweating on a call from team owner Dietrich Mateschitz.

The Austrian entrepreneur said: "In terms of marketing, rookies would be best."

"But for the moment it is easy and more intelligent to think about an experienced driver."

5 FOR FUN

1 Who scored after 19 seconds against Manchester United against Arsenal in a recent Division One game?

2 By what name is the golf tournament played in Sun City, South Africa now known? It was once called the Million Dollar Challenge.

3 Which footballer nicknamed 'Budgie' was capped by England while playing for Crystal Palace in the Third Division in 1962?

4 Which fast-bowler took a hat-trick for Australia against West Indies in a Test in Perth in 1988?

5 Which Sky Sports golf commentator was world junior champion in 1971?

ANSWERS: Page 55

Wilko in Euro bid

JONNY Wilkinson last night set his sights on Heineken European Cup glory and declared: "It is the biggest goal I have left in rugby."

England's fly-half eased through his comeback game after eight weeks out nursing a bicep injury as Newcastle beat Edinburgh 13-10 at Murrayfield to stay unbeaten in Pool Five.

He kicked penalty and converted wing Michael Stephenson's try and said: "It was the first pass I have taken and the first ball I have kicked for eight weeks, and I am satisfied how things went."

"The European Cup is the biggest thing you can do with a club. It is the biggest goal I have left in rugby."

SPORTWORD

CLUES ACROSS

- 1 The WInner of '77 Derby (8)
- 2 2,000 Guineas 1990 winner (5)
- 3 Venture, Grand National winner in 1987 (5)
- 4 1949 Winter Olympics Venue (6)
- 5 Peter, former Notts, Leicestershire and Essex and England spinner (4)
- 6 Charl ... winner of the Oaks in 1982 (4)
- 7 Italy striker who managed Chelsea and Watford (6)
- 8 Cudicini, Chelsea goalkeeper (5)
- 9 Thomas, Wales outside-half (5)
- 10 JPR , former Wales rugby union full back (8)

Ricky roars on to land showdown clash

HATTON GETS DREAM FIGHT

RICKY HATTON has landed his dream fight after destroying tough American Ray Oliveira to defend his WBU light-welterweight crown for the 15th time at London's ExCel Centre.

Hatton's reward for his 38th straight win is a crack at world No.1 ranked light-welterweight Kostya Tszyu's IBF title in Manchester next spring - at 4am!

Tszyu, a 35-year-old Australian-based Russian, made a sensational return to the ring last month after a 22-month injury lay-off due to Achilles and shoulder problems.

Stunning

He celebrated with a devastating third round knockout of Sharumba Mitchell in Arizona.

But Hatton laid down his credentials with a stunning 10th round knockout of 36-year-old Oliveira, who had previously never been stopped.

And there was no doubt who Oliveira will be backing after paying Hatton a massive accolade by saying: "He will be the best in the world - I have no doubt at all about that."

"Ricky is certainly the toughest guy I have ever met and he can go all the way to the top."

Although the date of the fight has yet to be finalised, the demands of US television networks dictate that the fight will take place at such an unearthly hour.

It is also understood that Tszyu will be paid in the region of £2.5m to put his title on the line in Hatton's back yard.

Deal

Hatton's promoter Frank Warren, who was in Las Vegas to watch Danny Williams' humiliation said: "It's the fight everyone's been calling for and we've got to compromise and do whatever it takes to make it happen."

"Ricky has got the fight that he wants. We have a deal and it will happen in



by KEVIN FRANCIS
at ringside

the spring. I have verbally agreed terms with Tszyu's promoter Vlad Wharton.

"He has to speak to Tszyu but he's the only guy who can deal with him."

"I spoke to Showtime network chief Jay Larkin and we have cleared it for the fight to take place in England in the spring."

This is probably the most money I've ever paid for a fighter outside the heavyweight division to box in England.

"Ricky has got home advantage and it has cost an arm and a leg."

Hatton is relishing the prospect, saying: "In his last fight Tszyu was absolutely fantastic. To

come back after two years out and do what he did was absolutely brilliant."

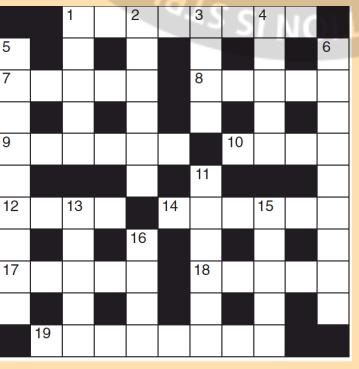
"But I will have a different style and it'll be a different fight, and I see no reason why I can't go in there with confidence."

"I think good fights like this one against Oliveira will do me the world of good when I get in the ring with him."

Better

"I've beaten everybody out there apart from the champion, but I'll enjoy Christmas first and then get back in the gym."

"I'm just getting better and better. Right now, I feel I just can't be beaten."



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Sid the top gun

■ Leicester 0 Reading 2

STEVE SIDWELL is still dreaming of a return to Arsenal next season as captain of Reading.

Sidwell took the brave step of quitting Highbury nearly two years ago after growing frustrated at a lack of chances under Arsene Wenger.

But the England Under-21 international insists he is reaping the rewards of leaving Arsenal despite joining the club as a kid.

Reach

Sidwell is convinced that Reading can reach the Premiership. He said: "It's still possible for us to go up automatically and I'm desperate to do that as I want to play in the Premiership."

"To go back to Arsenal would be a dream come true. It was a very tough decision to leave Arsenal but one I'm proud of."

Sidwell's spectacular 20-yard shot set the Royals on their way and defender Ivar Ingimarsson scored with a late header.

Hod call to Incey

■ Watford 1 Wolves 1

GLENN HODDLE has reassured Paul Ince that he still has a future at Molineux.

Skipper Ince missed his new manager's first game in charge due to a toe injury, but Hoddle said: "I will sit down and have a chat with Paul next week."

"He was magnificent for me as an international and although a few years have gone by, I've still got great respect for the lad."

Back

"He's club skipper and I'm sure he still can contribute to our season."

Ince might struggle to get back in. Keith Andrews played a starring role at the defensive tip of Hoddle's diamond midfield formation.

He drove Wolves on after they fell behind to Heidar Helguson's emphatic finish on just four minutes.

Watford keeper Richard Lee denied Dean Sturridge before Seyi Olofinjana volleyed the equaliser.

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Martin big hit 'n miss

Rotherham 2 Sheff Utd 2

ROTHERHAM skipper Martin McIntosh was hero and villain of a frantic derby clash.

The giant Scottish centre-back misjudged a back-pass and let in Andy Gray for a shot that Paul Shaw finished off when Mike Pollitt parried.

Then he redeemed himself with a towering header to earn his team a point.

The goal took his tally to three making him the Millers' joint leading scorer with Chris Sedgwick, now with Preston.

McIntosh admitted: "I think I panicked for their second goal and I was disappointed with myself. Then I scored so it means I've got three in nine."

Bag

"The lads showed a lot of spirit and in the end we could have probably nicked the game."

Blades striker Andy Gray admitted that his side were stunned by Rotherham's comeback.

He said: "It's very disappointing especially after being 2-0 up."

"The feeling is that we had three points in the bag and let it slip."

Two goals in three minutes either side of half-time from Michael Tonge and Shaw put the Sheffield side in the driving seat but then came Rotherham's fight-back with a Chris Swales header on 54 minutes and McIntosh's equaliser 20 minutes from the end.

Dean: I will go

Crewe 3 Plymouth 0

DEAN ASHTON fired Crewe into the top half of the Championship then admitted it's only a matter of time before he is sold.

Ashton, 21, struck twice in front of a host of Premiership scouts as well as Birmingham boss Steve Bruce.

Alex manager Dario Gradi rejected a £1.7m offer from Crystal Palace in the summer but Everton and Tottenham are now lining up £3m bids for the 19-goal striker in January.

Ashton said: "The boss has spoken to me about the situation and, although he wants to keep his best players, he accepts that they will move on."

Barged

Crewe took the lead with a Kenny Lunt free-kick and Ashton swept home his first after strike partner Steve Jones had been barged by Mathias Doumbe.

Then the lanky striker seemed to trip under the challenge of the hapless Doumbe and his bobbling shot trickled past Romain Larrieu.

Ashton explained: "The defender and I were grappling and he tried to clear the ball but missed it. That made the keeper miss it as well but I'm claiming it."

SERIOUSLY football

Kanoute cracker is perfect reply to Jol blast

WHAT'S WHAT FREDI KAN DO



SPURFECT: Kanoute fires home his spectacular winner



HAPPY: Martin Jol salutes another Spurs win

FREDI KANOUTE'S rehabilitation at Spurs took only 10 days. City's might take much longer.

Kanoute, hammered by boss Martin Jol after his Carling Cup calamity at Anfield, responded in the best way a striker can.

His goal wasn't only the winner, it was also the type of strike that will be remembered all season long, a left-foot drive that zipped beyond David James's despairing dive.

What a change from the Carling quarter-final, when he gave away a penalty at Liverpool, then missed one in the shoot-out as Spurs crashed out.

Tribute

Jol described Kanoute's dubious contribution as "unbelievable." Here, the Dutch coach paid tribute to his player's fighting qualities.

"He made a mistake at Anfield, but you have to forget about it," said Jol.

"Some players can be affected by things like that, but Fredi hasn't."

"He's a good professional. He's responded by working very hard. He is the complete player. I

have read in the papers that he and Simon Davies can go. That is rubbish. Every player has a future here - if he is prepared to work hard for me."

Kanoute, who probably wouldn't have played had Jermain Defoe not been suspended, made the most of his opportunity.

And his 54th-minute strike cranked up the frustration factor for the Eastlands faithful.

"I just saw the defender closing on me and I hit it instinctively," he said.

"It was particularly sweet, coming after my last full game, which was a hard one for me."

"But things like that can happen to anybody. If you are strong in your

mind you keep fighting to prove you will not let it get to you. I try not to read the criticisms of me and just get on with my life."

City boss Kevin Keegan had rapped his French ace Nicolas Anelka for telling a magazine that he wanted to play for a big club.

Image

The fact that 46,000 people regularly watch City makes them big, said Keegan. The problem is that the team isn't matching the club's "big" image.

A performance that was, frankly, inept, left Keegan admitting: "This is terribly disappointing for me."

"Three points would have seen us in the top half and looking for that

TEAMS

MAN CITY: James, Mills, Distin, Dunne, Jordan, Shaun Wright-Phillips, Bosvelt, Barton, Sibierski, Fowler (Anelka 71), Macken (Bradley Wright-Phillips 70). Subs: Onuoha, Waterreus, Flood.

TOTTENHAM: Robinson, Pamart, Naybet (Gardner 46), King, Atouba, Brown, Pedro Mendes (Kelly 46), Carrick, Ricketts (Redknapp 81), Kanoute, Keane. Subs: Fulop, Yeates. REF: D Gallagher.

eighth place of which I think we are capable. I don't think anything beyond that is possible.

"But we won't get into the top 10 playing like that. We know we have it within us but we have to produce it every week and, at the moment, we can't find that level."

"If we can produce only one decent effort in 90 minutes at home, then that tells the story."

He was referring to Antoine Sibierski's header wide from Stephen Jordan's cross.

Tough

Meantime, Spurs would have made this a crushing win had Robbie Keane, three chances, and Rohan Ricketts, cashed in.

City now face tough trips to Bolton and Everton and their boss is under no illusions.

"If we lose the next two games we will be sucked into it. But that is something I had to live with all last season."

by BILL THORNTON

Man City.....0 Tottenham.....1



Man City.....0 Tottenham.....1

SERIOUSLY
football

Canary back to his max after paddy

BENTLEY'S O-KAY NOW

by TIM GRAY

Norwich.....3
Bolton.....2

The eventual winner six minutes from time. A Fernando Hierro near-post header had given Bolton a half-time advantage but that was wiped out when Bentley lured veteran midfielder Gary Speed into tripping him on the edge of the box and Darren Huckerby made no mistake with his sixth goal of the season.

It was Bentley's fourth game back since his enforced absence and, according to the player himself, his best in a Norwich shirt but there is still some resentment over his treatment which is driving him to want to prove himself

Bentley said: "Whether one is right or one is wrong, it does not matter. We have put all that behind us now and are just getting on with staying in the Premiership."

"Things happen all the time with players and managers. Whether you like or hate somebody does not matter. It is just a matter of getting on with it."

"I am learning so much at the moment. I am learning how to win football matches, how to play week-in, week-out."

Bolton boss Sam Allardyce warned his players that there would be changes for next week's visit of Manchester City.

Flair

Twice experienced defender Hierro allowed Svensson to steal in behind him to score from free headers and Allardyce said: "It's really unacceptable because we work at that scenario so much."

"I think I have to change the back four. We've put up what we thought would be a solid unit but unfortunately that's shipped six in two games."

"Then we'll have to have a look in front of it and we might have to sacrifice one or two of our more flair players for a little bit more hard work and a little bit more resilience."

"Our defending was pathetic. That's relegation stuff from us now and we haven't been in that position for a long time."

TEAMS

NORWICH: Green, Edworthy, Doherty, Fleming, Charlton, Jonson (McVeigh 79), Helveig, Saif, Bent, Huckerby, Svensson, Subs: Drury, Ward, Jarvis, Shackell.
BOLTON: Jaskelainen, Hunt, Hierro, Jaidi, N'Gotty (Cesar 90), Giannakopoulos, Campo (Nolan 70), Speed, Okocha (Ferdinand 85), Pedersen, Davies, Subs: Oakes, Ben Haim, REF: B Knight.

JOB DONE: Svensson nods Norwich's winner

Joe's facing Forest chop

MICHAEL JOHNSON should have been basking in the glory of Derby's derby-day humiliation of Forest – which has intensified the pressure on boss Joe Kinnear.

But the Derby defender had bitter-sweet feelings as he contemplated the demise of the club he supported as a kid.

Most of his close friends are Forest fans and right now he knows the pain they are suffering.

He said: "I used to stand in the Trent End watching Neil Webb, Nigel Clough and my hero Des Walker and now look at them.

"All my mates are gutted because we did not just beat Forest, we completely outplayed

them. The league table does not lie. Forest are in big trouble."

After Tommy Smith fired Derby into third-minute lead, there was a constant stream of arguments among Forest players, and several heated debates between Andy Reid and Forest's assistant boss Mick Harford.

Grzegorz Rasiak made the most of Forest's shambles to score two second-half goals and it would have been worse for Forest had Ian Taylor not missed a penalty.

Whether Kinnear will be in charge for Friday's visit of Leicester remains to be seen.

■ Derby 3 Nott'm Forest 0

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Eaden: Latics won't slip up

**SERIOUSLY
football**

Big changes are on the way at Toon

by MARK OGDEN
Wigan 2 Gillingham 0

PROMOTION veteran Nicky Eaden has warned his Wigan team-mates that the club's Premiership push will only get tougher after Paul Jewell's men cemented top spot with three points against Gillingham.

Nathan Ellington's 14th goal of the campaign after 17 minutes and an 88th-minute effort from Scotland midfielder Lee McCulloch wrecked Stan Ternent's hopes of a winning start as Gills boss.

And the win means Wigan go into their clash with Ipswich at Portman Road in eight days' time a point clear of Joe Royle's team.

But former Barnsley and Birmingham promotion hero Eaden has ruled out suggestions Wigan are as good as in the top flight.

Key

Eaden, 32 yesterday, said: "When I went up with Barnsley, we were underdogs all season and that was the case here last year."

"But there is more expectation on the team now because teams are more wary of us."

"We've made a good start but there is still a long way to go. The Christmas period will be key."

"What is important is that we don't get too carried away, win or lose."

"If we win all of our games over Christmas or even drop a few points, nothing will be decided and we have to remember that."

Wigan found Gillingham a tough nut to crack under new manager Ternent.

The former Burnley boss has vowed to keep intact his proud record of never having taking a team down as a manager.

Ternent said: "We have 23 games left to play and we are going to have to win 12 of them if we are to stay up."

STONE SINGES SOUEY'S WHISKERS



by IAN MURTAGH
**Newcastle 1
Portsmouth 1**

THE day had started with Graeme Souness claiming that Newcastle were "just a whisker away from being a top side".

By the end of it, after Portsmouth had become the fifth successive side to leave St James's Park undefeated, the word "crap" had entered his vocabulary for the first time since becoming Toon boss.

And the worrying thing for the Geordies is that Souey wasn't necessarily talking about his much-criticised defence.

Souness inherited a squad bristling with talent but ill-balanced, with the sale of Jonathan Woodgate leaving them short of quality and quantity at the back. For weeks he has been counting down the days to the transfer window re-opening, so he can attempt to solve that problem.

The way he was talking on Saturday night, though, it's not just defenders he wants to recruit now.

Blunt

Laurent Robert looks set to become a high-profile casualty in the New Year, with Souness offering a blunt explanation of his decision to relegate the Frenchman to the bench.

"He does not work hard enough for me, either in training or in matches but that's all I'm saying about him," he rapped.

Sub Robert did himself no favours when he went on in the second half, though there were plenty of other candidates for that "crap" description.

Even the absence of Alan Shearer and Patrick Kluivert couldn't disguise the fact this is a team not only lacking in confidence but one that has gone backwards this season. In the



Harry's all for Strach switch

HARRY REDKNAPP is backing Portsmouth's ambitious plan to persuade Gordon Strachan to be their next manager.

Pompey are searching for a successor to Redknapp, who quit Fratton Park just over a fortnight ago before agreeing to move to Southampton.

Pompey chairman Milan Mandaric hopes to begin talks with the Scot this week. Redknapp said: "They could not make a better choice and why shouldn't he go there?"

"He lives only 15 to 20 minutes from

Portsmouth, so why not? Why should he have to manage in Scotland or somewhere because he has managed Southampton? He's a football manager. He's not committed a murder or anything, so let him do the job."

Strachan is refusing to comment on Pompey's pending approach. But his silence hints at a possible change of heart.

He is not dismissing a move to Fratton Park but a couple of weeks ago he claimed such a switch would be out of the question.

TEAMS

NEWCASTLE: Given, Taylor, Hughes, Bramble, Bernard, Jonas, Dyer, Bowyer (Ambrose 71), Milner (Robert 57), Bellamy, Ameobi. Subs: Elliott, Andrew O'Brien, Harper.
PORTRSMOUTH: Ashton, Griffin, Stefanovic, De Zeeuw, Primus, Stone, Faye, O'Neill, Berger, LuLuua (Cisse 87), Fuller (Taylor 84). Subs: Hislop, Berkovic, Hughes.
REF: M Riley.

past, a Newcastle side scoring after just three minutes at home would rattle up the goals against opponents as limited as Portsmouth.

But even with the luxury of Lee Bowyer's stunning volley, they always looked vulnerable to the sucker-punch, particularly after Kieron Dyer had missed a sitter 13 minutes later.

It duly arrived when a deflected shot by born-and-bred Geordie Steve Stone left Shay Given wrong-footed on the half-hour.

And, had Gary O'Neil displayed more composure later on, Pompey would have had their third straight win since Harry Redknapp's recent departure.

Charge

Stone believes that the vast experience within the Portsmouth squad is the key to their continued success.

"So many of us have seen it all before and we just get on with it," said the former England interna-

tional. "I think our recent performances prove we've not been badly affected."

"We hardly look like a team in crisis, do we?"

"But, of course, a club needs a manager and we know we can't go on like this forever."

"If the club decides to continue with the current set-up, with Joe Jordan taking charge, then that's fine, we'd accept that."

"But if someone else is going to come in then we need that to happen sooner rather than later."

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while raging Rovers urge FA to clamp down on the divers

YOU'RE A RUCKIN' CHEAT!

VETERAN Blackburn defender Craig Short has branded Crystal Palace striker Sandor Torgelle a "cheat".

Short was furious when the Hungarian only collected a yellow card for an incident that sparked a 20-man melee, while Rovers' team-mate David Thompson was sent off soon after.

Torgelle is gathering a reputation for diving and, after 86 sterile minutes, he sparked fury when he went down easily under a challenge from Lucas Neill.

Cavalry

The Blackburn full-back and Short berated him as the Hungarian wore the look of a man hit by a sniper's bullet.

Then the cavalry arrived for a mass skirmish, which ended with a sending-off for Rovers sub Thompson after an incident involving Fitz

TEAMS

CRYSTAL PALACE: Kiraly, Boyce, Hall, Popovic, Granville, Routledge (Torgelle 82), Rihbilahi (Andrews 53), Watson, Hughes, Kolka (Lakis 73), Johnson. Subs: Speroni, Leigertwood. **BLACKBURN:** Friedel, Neill, Short, Todd, Matteo, Reid (Thompson 71), Filcroft, Ferguson, Emerton, Dickov, Bothroyd (Stead 80). Subs: Enckelman, Johansson, Gallagher.

REF: A Wiley.

Hall. Short has been a professional in England for 16 years and the straight-talking centre-half is exasperated that diving, - or, in his words, "cheating", has become a part of Premiership football.

He wants the culprits dealt with more severely. "In any other sport, if you cheat, you get banned," he said. "Okay, Torgelle got a yellow

card but sometimes that's not enough punishment. It's sparked off an incident and we've had David Thompson sent off half."

"It was horrible to see and it goes on a bit too much in our division nowadays. It's crept in more and more in the last five years.

"Sometimes, it's difficult for the referees, because the game is so quick. Was it a dive or was it a foul? But players have got a responsibility to be honest and he was obviously dishonest. It's up to the authorities to stamp it out."

The FA is expected to

look into the brawl after cameras spotted Barry Ferguson kicking Hall. Thompson also took an age to leave the field.

Rovers would like to appeal against his sending-off but cannot do so under FA rules about second yellow cards.

Bangs

Torgelle was sent off for diving against Charlton in the Carling Cup and Rovers boss Mark Hughes added: "These things are more prevalent in the game these days."

The flashpoint did at least provide a moment to quicken the pulses.

Everything else, sadly, was put in the shade by the pre-match entertainment - loud bangs, a Kylie cover act and the Crystal Palace cheerleaders.



BRAWL BOYS: The 20-man melee which saw David Thompson sent off

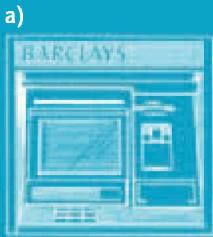
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**BLACKPOOL 1
BRISTOL CITY 1**

CITY manager Brian Tinnion defended Mickey Bell after his late penalty miss denied them a win.

"He will be there to take the next penalty," said Tinnion. "After all, you see Ruud van Nistelrooy and Thierry Henry miss penalties."

Blackpool coach Simon Grayson felt Luke Wilkshire dived for the penalty, saying: "We thought the ref was going to book the lad who went down."

City took the lead through Wilkshire, only for Scott Taylor to level from the spot.

**BRADFORD 1
WALSALL 1**

PAUL MERSON felt Walsall should have extended their winning run to four matches after running the show.

City salvaged a point with a David Wetherall equaliser seven minutes from the end after Marvin Robinson had put Walsall ahead, and Merson said: "We are just disappointed after dominating from start to finish. Apart from set-pieces I couldn't see them scoring."

Opposite number Colin Todd admitted: "This is probably a point gained rather than two points lost."

**HARTLEPOOL 3
STOCKPORT 1**

NEALE COOPER admitted his Hartlepool side had to work hard for this win over strugglers Stockport.

A brace from defender Chris Westwood and Joel Porter's goal ensured victory after Hartlepool fell behind to a Jon Daly strike.

"We didn't win as easily as the score suggests," said Cooper. "We let them dominate for spells."

County caretaker boss Mark Lillis said: "That was the best display since I was asked to run the team, but the result was the same because we made silly errors."

**LUTON 1
PORT VALE 0**

LUTON were indebted to a spectacular late strike from Ahmet Brkovic as they made hard work of beating under-strength Vale.

Town boss Mike Newell admitted: "For long periods things didn't go our way, but it was a great goal."

Valiants manager Martin Foyle, who included youth-team coach Andy Porter on the bench after the 36-year-old played his first game in four years in midweek, said: "I was disappointed we didn't leave with a point."

**MK DONS 3
WREXHAM 0**

DANNY WILSON made a storming start to life in charge of MK Dons as they took apart fellow strugglers Wrexham.

Nick Rizzo's strike, and two second-half goals from Wade Small, sealed the win, and delighted former Sheffield Wednesday boss Wilson said: "The third goal was fantastic and it shows what confidence can do for players."

Wrexham manager Denis Smith said: "To concede three goals is extremely disappointing, especially against a team that isn't ready yet to beat us 3-0."

**OLDHAM 2
HUDDERSFIELD 1**

OLDHAM assistant manager Tony Philliskirk saluted a 'magnificent' performance from keeper Les Pogliacomi, who kept out everything fired at him as Huddersfield piled forward seeking a late equaliser.

Philliskirk said: "We owe him for the points. He was magnificent and he pulled us out."

Goals from Will Haining and Kevin Betsy sealed Oldham's win either side of Pawel Abbott's strike for Town.

Huddersfield manager Peter Jackson said: "It was disappointing to give away an early goal and then another sloppy one before half-time."

"But we dominated in the second-half and all we were lacking was a bit of luck in front of goal."

**PETERBOROUGH 1
CHESTERFIELD 2**

CHESTERFIELD boss Roy McFarland praised his injury-hit side for a perfect response after a 4-1 midweek mauling by Oldham.

Those memories were erased as Chesterfield weathered a late onslaught from Posh, and McFarland said: "This was exactly the response I was looking for. We controlled the game for long periods and scored two well taken goals at crucial times."

Aaron Downes and Ian Evatt were on target for Chesterfield, and after Posh could only muster Curtis Woodhouse's consolation 15 minutes from time, a furious Barry Fry branded his side "toothless, lacklustre and complacent".

He said: "It was a terribly poor performance. We didn't play to an acceptable standard until the final 15 minutes."

"It was a case of too little, too late, and just wasn't good enough."

**SHEFF WED 1
BRENTFORD 2**

MARTIN ALLEN piled praise on his 10-man Brentford after goals from Alex Rhodes and Dean Burton turned the game on its head.

The Bees looked up against it after Michael Turner was sent off for professional foul and Steve MacLean finished from the penalty spot.

Allen, who was sent to the stands for swearing, said: "Over the last couple of months the team have played well and not got the points, so it's nice for that to change."

Wednesday's Paul Sturrock moaned: "The players were sauntering."

**SWINDON 1
DONCASTER 1**

ROVERS boss Dave Penney is dreaming of a third successive promotion, after Greg Blundell's opener was cancelled out by Town's Sam Parkin.

"I'm not stupid enough to think we can get promoted every season, but we could get into the play-offs," he said.

Swindon boss Andy King saluted teenager Luke Garrard, who impressed on his full league debut.

He said: "Sometimes you stumble across diamonds, and we've definitely found one."

**TORQUAY 0
BARNESLEY 1**

PAUL HART believes his in-form Barnsley side can still make the play-offs, after Michael Boulding's opportunist strike wrapped up victory at ragged Torquay.

Hart said: "It's a long shot and we've left it late, but if we average two points a game, and we are capable of that, we can get to 74 and that's usually enough."

Torquay boss Leroy Rosenior did not mince his words.

"We were shocking. We never passed the ball, we just lumped it," he said. "I can't accept that."

action round-up

**SERIOUSLY
football**

Self-destruct Saints stars

KEV: WE

**by PETER Southampton ...2
WHITE Middlesbrough...2**

THEY didn't give Harry Redknapp the lift-off he craved and they let a two-goal lead slip in the final two minutes – but there were genuine glimmers of hope for Southampton's future.

It was ironic that having turned in arguably their most impressive and entertaining performance for some time, Saints should slip one place down the Premiership table.

But the surrender of victory was not all their own doing. Most sides would have accepted damage limitation going into injury time with a two-goal deficit.

But Middlesbrough underlined why they have emerged from the pack of mid-table under-achievers to show true credentials for the right to a place in Europe again next season.

Hype

The visitors were first to admit they were never at their best and perhaps the hype surrounding Redknapp's first game in charge got to them more than it did to his own players.

But Steve McClaren's side were prepared to dig deep, sensing they could perform a great escape act as the nerves that have haunted Saints so often this campaign returned.

Danny Higginbotham's own-goal and Stewart Downing's 25-yard sizzler cancelled out the earlier efforts of impressive home strike pair Kevin Phillips and Peter Crouch to underline to Redknapp the enormity of the task he faces.

But bearing in mind he had barely a couple of days to get to know his new

TEAMS

SOUTHAMPTON: Niemi, Nilsson, Lundekvam, Jakobsson, Higginbotham, Fernandes (Teifer 45), Delap, Anders Svensson, Le Saux, Phillips, Crouch. Subs: Dodd, Smith, Griffit, Ormerod.
MIDDLESBROUGH: Schwarzer, McMillen, Higginbotham, Cooper, Southgate, Reegan, Parfitt (Job 83), Bostong, Zenden, Downing, Viduka, Hasselbaink. Subs: Nash, Doriva, Davies. REF: N Barry.

group, the signs are encouraging, and his players to a man are delighted to have him at the helm.

Phillips, given the skipper's armband, responded as Redknapp would have expected. And afterwards the striker said: "Harry has come to this club and given everyone a lift. I must admit I am delighted about his appointment.

"We now know we have a manager. No disrespect to Steve Wigley, who was a fantastic coach, but he was always under this illusion of whether he was the manager or not."

Phillips accepted: "We paid the price for a few crazy minutes. I haven't seen anything like that in a football game for ages. We deserved the win as we played well. It was a great atmosphere before the



MAKING HIS POINT: Stewart Downing gets Boro's leveller

IT'S COLD COMFORT FOR BATTER DEAN

DEAN WHITEHEAD blasted the goal which sent Sunderland surging to victory – and was then told by his manager: You shouldn't have been on the pitch!

The 22-year-old midfielder had been suffering from a heavy cold all week and revealed: "Mick McCarthy told me in the dressing-room afterwards that he was just about to pull me off.

"I was starting to feel a bit tired but

Cardiff 0 Sunderland 2

it's amazing what a goal can do for you. It's the perfect tonic."

McCarthy, whose side impressively maintained their promotion challenge with their first win in Cardiff for 33 years, said: "I had told Sean Thornton to warm up because I felt Dean was beginning to show the effects of that cold but Sean sat back

down as soon as the ball went in – he knew he wasn't going to get on then."

Whitehead's 20-yard blockbuster after 67 minutes – his second goal since his move from Oxford last summer – crushed Cardiff's resistance.

And Irish international Liam Lawrence ended a day of misery for the Welsh side with a delightful curling strike 10 minutes later.

It was Cardiff's sixth home defeat in a dismal season and under-pressure manager Lennie Lawrence blasted his side's defending.

Lawrence, who is likely to be given until the New Year to turn City's fortunes around, let his frustrations show as he said: "We gave away those goals far too easily. I was bitterly disappointed by our defending."

But that was a harsh judgement on two quality strikes which earned Sunderland a success they fully deserved.

Ifill's a towering success

Millwall 2 Brighton 0

very good player but he's going nowhere."

Substitute Ifill's goal, following Scott Dobie's opener, killed off Albion, whose boss Mark McGhee was unhappy with defender Danny Harding's contribution.

He said: "The goals we gave away were down to poor defending. And Dan was at the centre of two expensive mistakes."

PAUL IFILL added a little more glitter to his reputation with the kind of goal that will start attracting the top clubs.

The former Brighton player, who is still a big fan of the Seagulls, struck his fourth in only 10 appearances this season – six of which have been from the bench.

The 25-year-old wide man is tipped to follow the likes of Lucas Neill, Stephen Reid and Tim Cahill from the New Den. But Lions boss Dennis Wise said: "He is a

happy to have Redknapp in charge ARE WILD ABOUT HARRY

game, thanks to the new manager, and I thought we did well for most of the game. Conceding two late goals hurt me so much, but we only had ourselves to blame."

He added: "I can't believe anyone at Boro would say they deserved a point. If they do think that, I would like to meet them and have an argument. We just let them back in."

Lucky

Boro defender Colin Cooper ruefully admitted he thought there was no way back.

He said: "I looked up at the clock and we were two down with only a couple of minutes left but somehow we played our get-out-of-jail card."

"I know we were lucky, there is no point denying it."

Redknapp will spend the next few days leading up to Saturday's trip to Spurs trying to boost morale.

He said: "Everything in life is about confidence."

"I think you need to make people believe they are good. That's what I've got to do with these players."



KEV'S A RED MAN:
Kevin Phillips (above) is a fan of Redknapp

Ade hits 'em hard

■ Stoke 1 Coventry 0

ADE AKINBIYI was involved in a double did-he-didn't-he mystery as Stoke and Coventry were left looking at opposite ends of the table.

The striker was credited with the first-half match-winner, although his header took a touch off Richard Shaw.

Then a tangle with Sky Blues substitute Florent Laville sparked accusations that he had thrown a punch.

Akinbiyi went unpunished and the former £5m hitman departed quickly afterwards, but central defender Clint Hill said: "He's a machine. To have him charging down on us as a defender is a nightmare."

Dominant Coventry were frustrated when Stern John's late effort was ruled offside.

Currie spices up Royle order

■ by ERIC BROWN QPR 2 Ipswich 4

AT the age of 30 most footballers have lifestyle matters like retirement, pensions and alternative careers on their minds.

Darren Currie is an exception. The Ipswich newcomer is convinced he can still emulate his famous uncle Tony and succeed at the highest level.

Twinkle-toed Tony bewitched defenders during the 1970s for Sheffield United and Leeds, winning 17 England caps.

Darren may lack his uncle's dazzling skills but demonstrated on a dream debut that he possesses the same quick brain and shrewd eye for an opening.

Belief

Those assets served him in the lower divisions with Leyton Orient, Shrewsbury, Plymouth, Barnet, Wycombe and Brighton but now he has set his sights much higher.

"I have never played in the top flight but I never stop believing I can get there," Currie said.

"I have played around 400 games in the lower divisions but now I have my best chance of making it."

"I still have enormous belief and confi-

dence in my ability to win through." Substitute Currie scored a vital goal after a swift switch from relegation worries with Brighton, who accepted a £250,000 bid on Thursday.

"His versatility will be a huge asset for us," said manager Joe Royle.

The result keeps Ipswich hard on the heels of leaders Wigan after a topsy-turvy match brimful of incident.

Defender Jason De Vos headed Town in front but two magnificent Paul Furlong strikes sent Rangers in for the break ahead against the run of play.

Darren Bent, Currie and the excellent Shefki Kuqi ensured justice.

After three defeats in their last four games Rangers are being edged out of the promotion race.

Dejected manager Holloway has cancelled plans for an overseas scouting mission because his passport is missing.

"I'm shell-shocked we let in three in the second half," he added.

"It was a bitter pill to swallow. We need a defender and a striker."



action round-up

BRISTOL ROV 0 MACCLESFIELD 0

IAN ATKINS believes Macclesfield are the most defensive team to have visited Bristol Rovers' Memorial Stadium so far this term, after this goalless draw.

"They didn't want to play football. They played the game with a negative attitude and went home with what they wanted," said a frustrated Atkins.

However, Town boss Brian Horton said: "They never looked like hurting us. I thought we looked hard to beat and we continue to surprise people with our League position."

BURY 0 SOUTHEND 1

SHRIMPERS boss Steve Tilson admitted he was "over the moon" following his side's victory.

Wayne Gray scored from the penalty spot, before goalkeeper Bart Giemink saved one at the other end.

"It was a great save from Bart and I'm over the moon," said Tilson. "My players gave 100 per cent, it was a great performance and I'm delighted to get three points."

Bury boss Graham Barrow said: "The penalty miss summed up our performance."

CHESTER 1 SHREWSBURY 1

GARY PETERS felt his Shrews side was robbed after a twice-taken spot-kick in stoppage time gave Chester a point.

Michael Branch

scoared at the second attempt, after Kelvin Langmead had given the Shrews the lead.

Darren Moss, Martin O'Connor and Kevin Ellison were all sent off.

Peters said: "Nobody in the ground, apart from the referee, can see if a goalkeeper moves six inches or a foot off his line."

Chester boss Ian Rush admitted: "Maybe now our luck is changing."

DARLINGTON 3 LEYTON ORIENT 0

DARLINGTON boss David Hodgson is determined to keep hold of Alun Armstrong, after he scored again in this convincing win.

Clyde Wijnhard was also on target after Orient fell behind to an own goal from Alan White.

"Alun grabbed another goal for us and we hope that it will not be his last," said Hodgson.

Orient boss Martin Ling admitted: "We didn't get going at all and failed to perform as a team."

KIDDERMINSTER 2 ROCHDALE 1

NEW Harriers boss Stuart Watkiss described his side's hard-fought home win as a platform he can build on.

Dean Keates and Ian Foster were both on target for the hosts, while Grant Holt notched Rochdale's only goal.

Watkiss said: "I always thought getting the first win would be the most difficult thing, but hopefully now we can build on it."

Disappointed Dale boss Steve Parkin said: "We were poor, there's no getting away from that."

LINCOLN 0 CHELTENHAM 0

CHELTEHAM boss John Ward - a striking legend at Lincoln - was disappointed not to take all three points at Sincil Bank.

"We tried to attack them and at half-time were disappointed not to have a goal or two," he said. "The second half was even but we had a lot of pace."

Lincoln manager Keith Alexander said: "I'm disappointed not to win and score at home, but we are building nicely. To go into Christmas in eighth place is a great position to be in."

MANSFIELD 0 RUSHDEN 0

MANSFIELD caretaker boss Carlton Palmer bemoaned his side's misfortune after the Stags dominated Rushden, only to emerge with a goalless draw.

The Stags are without a win in 10 games, but Palmer was happy with his team's performance.

"That was as one-sided a game as I can remember; I wouldn't have liked to have been the opposing manager watching that for 90 minutes," Palmer said.

Rushden manager Ernie Tippett said: "We were poor, but we've ended up with a point."

NORTHAMPTON 2 BOSTON 1

MANAGER Colin Calderwood praises top scorer Scott McGleish after his late winner claimed three points against Boston.

McGleish pounced after Boston's Andy Kirk had cancelled out Martin Smith's opener.

Calderwood said: "That's an important three points for us. Scott McGleish showed his predatory instincts in the penalty area."

Pilgrims boss Steve Evans said: "We didn't look like conceding, but two individual errors proved very harsh indeed."

NOTTS CO 0 WYCOMBE 1

JOHN GORMAN was delighted with the way Ian Stonebridge responded to being left out against Bury, after the striker sealed the new Wycombe boss's first win against Notts.

Stonebridge struck just before half-time.

Gorman said: "He got a kick up the backside from being left out. I'm glad I did it, because he was terrific."

County's caretaker boss Ian Richardson said: "That's two defeats in a week, which is disappointing, and we have to shake ourselves up."

OXFORD 2 CAMBRIDGE 1

AS ONE boss arrived, another departed.

New Oxford boss Ramon Diaz was happy after this winning start, but it cost opposite number Herve Renard his job.

Goals from Tommy Mooney and Craig Davies were enough, despite Jermaine Easter getting one back.

Diaz, speaking through a translator, said: "We've had a good start but have a lot of work ahead."

Cambridge's ninth straight defeat left them second from bottom.

SCUNTHORPE 1 SWANSEA 0

IRON boss Brian Laws could not hide his delight after his side dominated promotion rivals Swansea.

Steve Thorpe's goal after 40 seconds settled the contest, with Laws saying: "This was a fantastic result, we oozed class and played some consistent and electrifying football."

"This could be the turning point of our season, we are now seven points clear."

Swansea boss Kenny Jackett said: "I have no complaints. Scunthorpe had the edge and our keeper did fantastically."

YEOVIL 2 GRIMSBY 1

GARY JOHNSON saluted a professional display from his Yeovil players after they moved into second place courtesy of this 2-1 win.

Lee Johnson's free-kick, and a Bartosz Tarachuski header, sealed the win, before a consolation goal from Ashley Sestanovich.

"They were three important points," Johnson said.

Grimbsy's Russ Slade praised his team for their performance - except for conceding the second. "We lost our discipline to give that away," he said.

THE WEEK'S BIG GAMES

TONIGHT

 Barclays Premiership
 Fulham v Man Utd (8pm)

Nationwide South: Thurrock v Basingstoke (7.45)

TOMORROW

(7.45 unless stated)

FA Cup

Second Round Replays

Brentford v Hinckley

Swansea v Stockport

Barclays Premiership

Liverpool v Portsmouth (8pm)

North: Kettering v Vauxhall, Lancaster v Southport, Bradford Rovers v Stalybridge, South: Bishop's Stortford v Margate, Cambridge City v Lewes,

National Conference Cup—2nd Rnd: North: Workington v Grimsby

UniBond—Prem: Marine v Hyde, Workington v Bishop's Stortford

Southern—Prem: Rugby Utd v Histon

Vauxhall Masterfit Welsh Prem: Haverfordwest v Llanelli (7.30)

WEDNESDAY

(7.45 unless stated)

FA Cup

Second Round Replay

Notts County v Swindon

UEFA Cup

Group E

Middlesbrough v Partizan Belgrade

Villarreal v Algeciras

Group F

Graz AK v AZ Alkmaar

Rangers v Auxerre

Group G

Heerenveen v Bevere

VfB Stuttgart v Dinamo Zagreb

Group H

AEK Athens v Aachen

Lille v Seville

Nationwide South: Newport Co v Grays

THURSDAY

(7.45 unless stated)

UEFA Cup

Group A

Basel v Feyenoord

Hearts v Ferencvaros

Group B

Parma v Besiktas

Standard Liege v Athletic Bilbao

Group C

Bruges v Real Zaragoza

FC Utrecht v Austria Vienna

Group D

Newcastle v Sporting Lisbon

Sochaux v Panionios

FRIDAY

(7.45 unless stated)

Coca-Cola Championship

Brighton v Stoke

Notts Forest v Leicester

Coca-Cola League One

Grimsby v Oxford

Southend v Chester

Vauxhall Masterfit Welsh Prem: Abertillery v Port Talbot (7.30)

SATURDAY

(3pm unless stated)

Barclays Premiership

- Birmingham v West Brom (12noon)

1 Blackburn v Everton

2 Bolton v Man City

3 Chelsea v Norwich

- Man Utd v Crystal Palace (5.15)

- Middlesbrough v Aston Villa

4 Tottenham v Southampton

Coca-Cola Championship

5 Coventry v Watford

6 Gillingham v Rotherham

7 Ipswich v Wigan

OFF

(Now playing Tuesday, December 14)

8 Plymouth v Derby

9 Preston v West Ham

- Reading v QPR (12.45)

10 Sheff Utd v Cardiff (12noon)

11 Sunderland v Burnley

SUNDAY

(3pm unless stated)

Barclays Premiership

- Birmingham v West Brom (12noon)

12 Wolves v Crewe

Coca-Cola League One

13 Barnsley v Peterborough

14 Bournemouth v Swindon

15 Brentford v Colchester

16 Bristol City v Luton

17 Chesterfield v Torquay

18 Doncaster v Sheff Wed

OFF

(Now playing Sunday, December 19)

- Huddersfield v Bradford (12noon)

19 Hull v Tranmere

20 Port Vale v Oldham

21 Stockport v MK Dons

22 Walsall v Blackpool

23 Wrexham v Hartlepool

Coca-Cola League Two

24 Boston Utd v Darlington

25 Cambridge Utd v Bury

26 Cheltenham v Kidderminster

**SERIOUSLY
football**

Lee-thal Blues are dancing

CAR CURES 7-YEAR ITCH

by DAVE ARMITAGE

Everton.....1 Liverpool....0

DAVID MOYES found himself rudely interrupted but his broad grin suddenly developed into a full-scale chuckle.

It was the sound of Everton fans singing in the streets that did it, as the Goodison boss knew he was responsible for starting a weekend-long drinking session for the blue half of the city.

Some wives and families were about to be deserted, sales of paracetamol would go through the roof and there will be a few absences from the shop floor this morning.

Most had already started tipping it back, the noisy ones were on their way to the bar and a delighted Moyes laughed: "I don't know how long it is since I've heard them

singing in the streets like that – probably when Wayne Rooney scored that one against Arsenal."

Rooney has gone – to a side beneath Everton – and incredibly, there is talk of titles and Europe, and definitely not being relegated, after Moyes helped mastermind the club's first derby win in seven years at Goodison and five all told.

"It means a lot to those people," said Moyes, sipping a mineral water.

"They'll probably go to work on Monday morning straight from the pub. They've got every right to enjoy this

moment – they've waited long enough."

But the really sore heads were on the red side of town after Lee Carsley's 68th-minute goal had unbelievably sprung Everton into second spot.

Carsley's goal will stand in the record books as the deciding factor but it was the masterful job he did curtailing Steven Gerrard which was undoubtedly one of the key factors in this victory.

Everton fans have plenty to sing about – not only are they above Liverpool but there is a 12-point gap. "Well, relegation shouldn't

happen for a start," added Moyes. "Still being in the top 10 at the end of the season has to be an aim but we have to be looking to be in the mix come the end of February and who knows, Europe."

Liverpool, once the undisputed kings of the continent, might have a scrap on to get into contention after Carsley floored them with a shot which he virtually passed into the net.

True, Everton were left thanking keeper Nigel Martyn for two great stops from Neil Mellor and Gerrard but they should have been in front when Tim Cahill headed an easy chance wide.

Damage

"I should have put us ahead," agreed Cahill. "Any other day my header would have gone in. It was one of those where you think you have scored before you've even headed the bloody thing."

But it just didn't matter when Carsley's shot from the edge of the box suddenly nestled in the bottom of the net, sparking a mass celebration.

Some dejected Reds fans will be pointing the finger at keeper Chris Kirkland, who didn't make a very convincing effort to deal with it but was cleared of blame by his opposite number.

"You could even see from where I was that he was unsighted," said Martyn. "I thought he was a bit unlucky because it was obvious his line of vision was obstructed."

Everton diehards didn't care how it came, though Moyes revealed: "Lee deserved that because he did a job on Gerrard and he did it as well as anyone in the country could have tackled it."

TEAMS

EVERTON: Martyn, Hibbert, Stubbs, Weir, Pistor, Carsley, Osman (Watson 87), Gravens (Vobo 83), Cahill, Kilbane, Bent (Ferguson 76), Subs: Wright, McFadden.

LIVERPOOL: Kirkland, Josemi, Carragher, Hyypia, Risse, Diaz (Alonso 78), Hamann (Nunez 66), Gerrard, Kewell, Shlomo Pongolle (Traore 75), Mellor, Subs: Finnin, Dudek.

REF: S Bennett.



Becks bomb fear

DAVID BECKHAM and Michael Owen were at the centre of a bomb scare last night when Real Madrid's game with Real Sociedad was abandoned with three minutes to go.

There was chaos at the Bernabeu when steward went on to the pitch and spoke to the referee who then took the players off. A stadium announcer then told everyone to leave the stadium as quickly and calmly as possible.

News reports said that the Basque newspaper Gara had received a telephone call from Basque terrorist group ETA saying a bomb had been placed in the stadium aimed to explode at

9pm Spanish time. Owen and Beckham were ushered out of the stadium immediately after the game which was abandoned as a 1-1 draw. Sociedad striker Nihat Kahveci scoring a second-half equaliser to cancel out Ronaldo's 41st-minute opener for Madrid.

The result keeps Madrid 11 points behind leaders Barcelona who snatched a 2-1 win at Albacete on Saturday thanks to a superb late strike from Xavi.

The Spanish international latched onto a poor clearance to crack home a volley just five minutes from time after a poor

clearance from the Albacete defence.

Andres Iniesta put Barca ahead with less than two minutes on the clock. But Albacete levelled through Gonzalez before Xavi's clincher.

Meanwhile Real want to talk to Arsenal's out-of-favour midfielder Edu within the next three weeks with a view to signing him in January.

Valencia and Barcelona also want the Brazilian but prefer to wait to the end of the season when he will be out of contract.

Arsenal could ask up to £3m for the midfielder who wouldn't be eligible to play in the Champions League.



ON THE BALL: Beckham last night

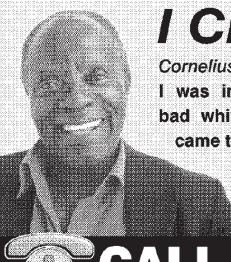
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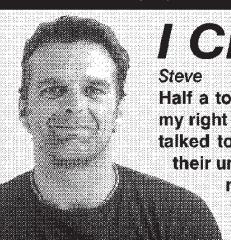
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**SERIOUSLY
football**

Keeper's horror blunder

VILLA ARE SUCH SOR LOSERS!

DON'T buy Thomas Sorensen a video of goalkeeping gaffes for Christmas.



by DAVE ARMITAGE

A Villa.....1 Birmingham.....2

Sorensen's astonishing blunder just eight minutes into this blood-and-thunder clash set Birmingham up for a much-needed and thoroughly deserved derby victory.

The big Dane won't be in this year's video mickey-take but he won't need telling he could be in a future edition after letting a tame Clinton Morrison shot bounce over him.

It wasn't quite up to the infamous Peter Enckelman incident which started Villa's recent derby misery - but it wasn't far off.

David Dunn sealed the victory and

though Gareth Barry blasted a late consolation goal for David O'Leary's men, the scoreline shouldn't be allowed to disguise this comprehensive defeat.

Birmingham really should have been at least four goals to the good at half-time.

They failed to kill a game off that was there for the taking and ended up having to sweat out the final couple of minutes of stoppage time as Villa desperately tried to salvage

something. But Steve Bruce's men hung on to keep up their unbeaten derby record in the Premiership.

This was their third victory following two draws last season and that is tough to stomach for Villa fans.

Sorensen's unbelievable cock-up was merely the firing of the starting pistol for an opening 45 minutes, which was as compulsive viewing as you're likely to see.

Too often derby matches fail to live up to the pre-match billing but these two sides slugged it out good and proper.

And while Villa went in with their tails between their legs and two goals adrift, they can count themselves fortunate they hadn't been blasted out of sight.

Birmingham could quite easily have been three or four goals to the good as they cashed in on their little spot of good fortune and set about trying to rub their fierce rivals' noses in it.

Flicked

Bruce's men started as big underdogs with the bookies but served notice of their intentions after just 90 seconds when a Robbie Savage free-kick found Matthew Upson at the far post and the big defender sent a header narrowly over.

But they didn't have to wait long to take the lead.

Emile Heskey flicked the ball into Morrison's path and he did superbly well to hold off Mark Delaney before firing a shot goalwards.

There didn't seem any danger, particularly given Sorensen's safe reputation.

But the occasion seemed to temporarily get the better of him.

Sorensen misjudged an innocuous bounce and somehow ended up merely palming the ball over himself and into the net.

Birmingham fans could not believe their luck as a stunned Villa Park struggled to take it all in - but there was more to come.

With just 17 minutes on the clock, Birmingham did the unthinkable and



FLASH POINT:
Robbie Savage tries to split up Gareth Barry and Damien Johnson

Sulli looks to Curbs in Hammers buy-out

DAVID SULLIVAN'S plans to buy West Ham or Tottenham include his friend and neighbour Alan Curbishley.

If Birmingham owner Sullivan pulls off a deal next year, most likely with West Ham, Charlton boss Curbishley would be his choice as manager.

The men live near each other in the exclusive Essex suburb of Theydon Bois and Sullivan has courted Curbishley for the manager's post at St Andrews in recent years.

Now Sullivan says he is ready to quit Birmingham because he is

tired of the eight-hour round trip to home games.

The word is that Curbishley, in charge at The Valley 15 years next summer, will be Sullivan's No.1 target when he takes on "one more challenge at a club nearer London".

Curbishley, a former Hammers midfielder, has done a marvellous job at Charlton, one of the best-run clubs in the country.

But sources say the man who has been linked with several Premiership clubs in recent seasons may be ready for another challenge.

EXCLUSIVE by BILL THORNTON



sets up Brum for more derby glory



OH, NO: Thomas Sorensen looks to have Clinton Morrison's shot covered – only to bungle it (below)



grabbed another goal, a finely-worked move between Morrison and Damien Johnson ending with Dunn smashing the ball home from eight yards.

Villa were reeling and more by luck than judgement managed to drag themselves in at half-time still within sight of being able to claw something back.

Dunn should have made it three in the 23rd minute after another superb lay-off by Heskey but his angled shot was blocked by Sorensen.

On the half-hour it was Dunn again who tried to put the game beyond reach.

After playing a neat one-two with the impressive Heskey, he set himself up for another shot from a tight angle.

up with almost all the outfield players pushing and shoving each other.

Kenny Cunningham and Olof Mellberg were head-to-head in the centre of things.

Referee Steve Dunn did well to sort it all out without sparking more trouble, though it has to be said Johnson was a little unfortunate to be booked for kicking the ball as Barry was sitting on it.

Danger

Mellberg was booked for his part in the fracas and although things were in grave danger of getting out of hand, the game just about managed to keep itself on track and proved to be a full-blooded but mostly legitimate encounter.

But right on half-time, it could quite easily have been as good as over; when Dunn put Heskey through on goal and the big hitman looked set to score.

But Heskey chose to take the outside track rather than cut inside and though his left-foot shot again beat Sorensen, it struck the foot of the post and rolled away to safety.

TEAMS

ASTON VILLA: Sorensen, De la Cruz, Mellberg, Delaney, Samuel, Solano, McCann, Davis, Barry, Cole, Angel, Subs: Postma, Berson, Whittingham, Ridgewell, Luke Moore.

BIRMINGHAM: Makinson, Tebby, Upson, Cunningham, Lazaridis (Clapham 30), Johnson, Carter, Savage, Dunn (Gray 59), Morrison (Anderton 82), Heskey, Subs: Vaesen, Yorke.

REF: S Dunn.

Bruce blast at Mellberg

OLOF MELLBERG was told to keep his mouth shut after a jubilant Birmingham camp revealed some Swede inspiration had stirred them on to victory.

Steve's men smashed Villa's unbeaten home record with a 2-1 victory and gave skipper Mellberg the credit for winding them up.

The big Swede revealed he didn't like Birmingham, or much about them, 24 hours before the big game – and the words came back to haunt him.

Blues boss Steve Bruce smiled: "I read all that rubbish that he wouldn't play for Birmingham. Well, on that performance he wouldn't get a game for us."

Spice

"I didn't have to really give a team talk because I just let Mr Mellberg's words do the talking for me."

"He should take a look at the likes of Matthew Upson's performance today – he's a proper centre-half."

"It all adds spice to things but what he said was seen by my players and we ended up thoroughly deserving to win."

"We really could have been four or five up at half-time. Every time we went forward we

looked a threat in the first half."

Blues midfielder Robbie Savage also round-ed on Mellberg, claiming: "He always opens his mouth. Every time we play Villa he says something derogatory."

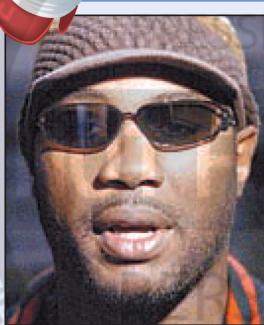
"I've got a big mouth but I try to say things at the right time."

But Mellberg was unrepentant after the game and said: "I haven't changed my opinion. I was asked a question and answered it honestly."

Disappointed Villa boss David O'Leary refused to blame keeper Thomas Sorensen's error for the defeat. "Thomas didn't mean to do it but we let ourselves down in the first half."

Information Station

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COMEBACK: Lewis fancies it

Lewis: I'll take him

From Back Page

and looking back at me. It would take me nine months to be ready for a fight again.

"I was stirred and wanted to jump into the ring. I wanted to say to Danny, 'let me get in and help you, show how it's done'."

Lewis would surely be foolish to come back now, but he is clearly motivated because of the lack of quality heavyweights around to take on Klitschko.

He adds: "Who is there? They tell me Hasim Rahman is in good shape and maybe Chris Byrd could step up. But there are no guys to choose from. It's wide open."

Class

"There are six or eight fighters around, B class who have moved up to A class only because I retired. This fight means nothing to Klitschko and he gained nothing from it."

"We knew he is awkward and hard to beat before the fight and the stats show that this should never have taken place. The class gap was too wide."

"It was Danny's chance and he deserves praise for his heart and determination. Rocky has always been his hero and he was like him but didn't have the power."

Danny to carry on

■ by BRIAN WOOLNOUGH

DANNY WILLIAMS emerged from his battering to insist he still wants to carry on fighting.

Manager Frank Warren has told Williams to quit but the 31-year-old still wants to fight despite the wounds, mentally and physically. "I had a scan at the hospital and everything is fine," he said.

"I have not been put off and will talk it over with my management. I take inspiration from Frank Bruno who was beaten and still went on to become world champion. My inclination at this moment is that I don't want to finish."

Brilliant

Williams' trainer Jim McDonnell said: "Danny has been checked over and he is A1 OK. He will come back fighting and I can't see him quitting."

McDonnell, who baited Vitali Klitschko throughout the build-up, offered no praise in defeat. He said: "Klitschko didn't finish off and I thought Danny's courage was brilliant."

SHOWDOWN IN VEGAS: Klitschko's

BATTERED,



FACE OF PAIN:
Williams is on
his knees at the
end of the fight

Hatton gets his dream shot: Page 45

power smashes brave Williams' title hopes to pieces

BLOODY'D N BEWILDERED

IT was just like a scene from *Rocky* as a battered, bloodied and brave Danny Williams was punched into submission ... and hospital.

This was a ferocious beating as Williams tried to emulate his film hero Sylvester Stallone, only this time there was no glory. It was a complete nightmare for him.

It was a miracle it went eight rounds, for Williams was almost out on his feet from the pummelling he took in the first.

Yet on and on he went, blindly walking into jabs and right hands, his eyes rolling, his legs like jelly. You get nothing for bravery, only admiration - and a cut eye.

Williams was whisked to hospital. Not many heavyweights have taken so much punishment. Some get knocked out quickly. This was a non-stop barrage of blows to his head and body. He had nothing to offer the fight apart from guts.

He was finally released from hospital four hours after the end of the fight and his manager Frank Warren now wants him to retire to prevent him taking similar punishment.

It should have been stopped earlier and Williams' corner would have thrown in the towel at the end of the eighth even if a big right hand, then a left and another right had not sent the challenger under the ropes.

Robotic

Vitali Klitschko remains the heavyweight champion of the world. He is not a great fighter but he's big, powerful, robotic and the best in a poor era of heavyweights.

He is not a devastating puncher. That was proved by the fact he couldn't finish off Williams after the first round when the 31-year-old from Brixton was all over the place, including on the floor for a count of eight.

You felt sorry for Williams because he was so out of his depth. Only once did he connect properly. Klitschko didn't even blink.

The tale of this brutal victory is in the punch stats. Klitschko threw 519 punches, compared to Williams 193. He connected with 296, while Williams landed only 44.

Klitschko threw 236 jabs, hitting the target 99 times, while Williams managed only 96, landing only six of them. Power punches were even more embarrassing, the big champion from Ukraine smashing 197 of 283 thrown into Williams face or body. Williams struck 38 times from 97 attempts.

Williams will relive this fight in his nightmares and the image will always be the same. His head snapping back from the jabs and when the big right hands came he simply couldn't get out of the way.

I said on Saturday morning I thought it would be beyond him but no-one here believed Williams would be so out of reach of Klitschko.

There was no movement and all the pre-match baiting of the champion, claims of a lack of stamina and that he would easily cut were ripped up within minutes.

Williams didn't win five seconds of his chance of a lifetime and the moment will never return for him. He admitted before going to hospital: "I kept on fighting because this was the heavyweight championship of the world but it was just too good for me."

"He was a lot more awkward than I expected, far harder. He didn't hit me as hard as Mike Tyson but was more consistent. My cut eye made it hard for me to see the right hands coming and he was just too clever for me."

WOOLY'S WORLD BIG FIGHT SPECIAL



From BRIAN WOOLNOUGH
in Las Vegas

Far more damning was the verdict from manager Frank Warren. He said: "I'd like him to turn it in and that will be my advice. *"He should think seriously about what he should do because you can't take punishment like that. He's earned good money from this fight and I'd like him to be able to spend it."*"

Even in the ring before the start, Williams didn't look right. Talk of his new-found confidence turned into a joke as he stalked around, criss-crossing in front of the champion, who never took his eyes off him. Clearly, Williams' mind was all over the place. He almost forgot to put his gumshield in.

The first round was a total mismatch. Williams' plan to attack and box the fight at his tempo never happened. He was smashed around like a kid losing a street fight against the local hard case. It was awful and he ended the round staggering back to his stool.

Welcome to the real world, somewhere he had never been before. Yes, he had beaten Tyson in July, the reason he got this chance. All this has proved, however, is how far Tyson has now fallen.

We thought it was Klitschko who would cut, not Williams. The injury he sustained in the first oozed claret throughout, dripping into his right eye. The referee and doctor should have put him out his misery earlier.

A left hand from Klitschko almost lifted Williams off his feet in the third and Danny simply wasn't good enough to land the punches he had promised. His defence was poor, his movement non-existent and his own punching off target.

Sprawling

At the end of the sixth Williams could hardly get back to his corner, walking like a drunk after a long night out.

He was sent sprawling in the seventh and the eighth brought the end, a combination Williams couldn't see, let alone cope with.

Klitschko said: "My fist hurts because I hit him so many times with power punches. I was surprised how hard his chin is and that he kept going. He took so much pressure."

For Klitschko's next fight the smart money is on Hasim Rahman, the guy who once knocked out Lennox Lewis and is back in shape and hungry.

Williams should not have been anywhere near this level of competition. He was the Rocky of the real world without the glory. Rocky in spirit only. Rocky without the punches.

Danny Williams got beaten up badly and we may not be seeing him again. Bravery at this level is simply not enough.



DOWN IN ONE:
Danny Williams
crashes to the
canvas in the first



OUT: Williams is knocked down for the fourth and final time in the eighth round

Saha's KO has Fergie fuming

■ by BILL THORNTON

LOUIS SAHA will be a frustrated spectator when Manchester United visit his former club Fulham tonight.

And United boss Sir Alex Ferguson isn't happy about the circumstances surrounding his £12.8m striker's absence, especially as Ferguson isn't sure whether top gun Ruud van Nistelrooy will be fit to play.

Saha is out until the New Year with knee ligament trouble and Ferguson blames his frequent trips to represent France.

"Louis never gets injured when he's with us. It's only when he's with France that he gets injured," said an angry Ferguson.

Saha made an explosive start to his United career following his controversial move last January, a deal that Fulham's Chris Coleman insisted would never happen.

But it has all gone sour for Saha, whose appear-



SAHA: Injury mystery

ances this season have been restricted to five starts, four as a sub – with one goal to show.

Saha returned from Euro 2004 with a knee ligament problem which seems to have been aggravated on his international journeys in September and last month.

He last played – and scored – in the Carling Cup win against Palace on November 10. "I don't know why it keeps happening," said Ferguson. "Maybe he's so keen to do well and trying to establish himself in the France team. Who knows."

"But any injury he gets he's been getting with France. We'll have to look at that a bit more closely."

If van Nistelrooy's calf problem rules him out, Ferguson's strike-force will be cut in half. Not that the threat of Alan Smith and Wayne Rooney is anything to underestimate.

EDWIN VAN DER SAR has been given a big pat on the back by Fulham boss Chris Coleman ahead of tonight's clash.

The Dutch international keeper recently suffered a spell on the bench for the first time in his Fulham career as Mark Crossley found a rich vein of form.

But Van der Sar has now returned to the first team and Coleman said: "Ed carried on working hard on the training pitch, kept his mouth shut and just got on with it and showed a good attitude."

SERIOUSLY football

Wenger forced to grin and bear it as



I DON'T BELIEVE IT: Two-goal striker Thierry Henry blazes a golden chance for the hat-trick over the Chelsea bar



REFFIN' MAD

From Back Page

forget about Arsenal's second goal," blasted Mourinho. "So I don't think the result if fair."

"There are the same rules all over the world — First Division, Second Division, China, Japan, Mexico, England — at every level of football of the game."

"In pre-season we had a top referee from this country at our training ground at Harlington."

"He put up a nice screen and a projector to explain the rules of football, so there was no doubt about it."

"One of the things he explained was walls, distance and the whistle. Everything was clear and explained to our squad."

Visit

"I don't want to speak about it, because if I do maybe I'll have to go to the FA for a visit."

"Maybe I'll have to sit in the stand for a few weeks, or spend some money and it's Christmas and I'd rather spend money on gifts."

Henry scored a similar goal against Aston Villa last season and three years ago Leeds' Ian Harte caught out Arsenal with a quick free-kick.

Henry confirmed Poll had asked him if he wanted to take the kick quickly.

"He asked me if I wanted to wait

for the whistle and ten yards," said Henry. "I said 'No', so he said 'You can have a go'."

"I was just waiting for Eidur Gudjohnsen to get out of the way and the referee allowed me to do it."

Poll insisted: "The whistle does not need to be blown. I asked Henry 'Do you want a wall?' He said: 'Can I take it, please?' He was very polite, and I said yes."

"I deal with the laws of the game. I deal with facts. I gave a signal for him to take it, and that's what he did."

"The same thing happened when I refereed Chelsea against West Ham in a FA Cup replay two years ago, when Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink scored, and I don't remember them complaining about it at the time."

Gunners boss Arsene Wenger said he was unaware of any rule change regarding quick free-kicks.

Wenger admitted: "I don't agree with the rule because it is difficult to defend but it is the rule."

"What Thierry did was an intelligent exploitation of the rule because the keeper knows the rule as well."

Footballer of the Year Henry has been accused of not playing in big games and he couldn't resist a snap back at his critics.

He said: "It's always said I only score in small games so today must have been a small one."

BACK ON TERMS:
Chelsea striker Eidur
Gudjohnsen stoops to
make it 2-2



Mourinho's men battle back for priceless point



JOSE LAUGHING NOW, ARSENE?



by DANNY
FULLBROOK

Arsenal 2
Chelsea 2

ARSENAL WENGER will be gutted his side wasted the chance to wipe the smile off Jose Mourinho's face.

The Gunners boss promised his Chelsea counterpart he would not be laughing after this game.

But after twice coming from behind, and then surviving a late onslaught, Mourinho was grinning from ear to ear at escaping from Highbury with a draw.

Thierry Henry had given Arsenal the lead twice, only for the champions to be dragged back.

And with 10 minutes to go the best striker in the Premiership had the perfect chance to grab all three points and his hat-trick.

Vital

But when he was slipped the ball by Robert Pires, Henry could only fire high over the crossbar at the vital moment.

This was the chance for Arsenal to get back close to Chelsea and apply pressure over the Christmas period.

As Mourinho pointed out, whatever the result Chelsea were always going to stay top of the league but the fact he still has a five-point lead is hugely significant.

Arsenal came flying out of the traps as quick as any highly-toned greyhound but even they could not have imagined getting off to such a perfect start.

Only 72 seconds of this titanic tussle had gone when Henry found the net for the first time in the game.

And that summed up just how fired up the Gunners were for this crunch clash.

Sol Campbell launched a long ball forward for Henry to head down to Jose Antonio Reyes on the left.

Looping

The Spaniard returned a cushioned header back to his team-mate and Henry struck instinctively with his left foot to send the ball looping wide of a static Petr Cech.

Chelsea had not even had a chance to become accustomed to the surroundings and they were already a goal behind.

Mourinho had been carefree in the build-up but he must have been cursing under his

TEAMS

ARSENAL: Almunia, Lauren, Toure, Campbell, Cole, Pires, Flamini, Fabregas, Reyes (Clichy 82), Bergkamp (Van Persie 82), Henry. Subs: Senderos, Hoyte, Lehmann.

CHELSEA: Cech, Paulo Ferreira, Ricardo Carvalho (Drogba 45), Terry, Gallas, Duff, Tiago (Bridge 45), Makelele, Lampard, Robben, Gudjohnsen (Parker 77). Subs: Kezman, Cudicini.

REF: G Poll.

breath at Chelsea's wretched start. However, he was cheered by the first of their two equalisers. The table-toppers gave warning when Frank Lampard struck a fierce 20-yard shot which Manuel Almunia tipped over the bar.

That save vindicated Wenger's decision to keep faith with the under-fire Spaniard.

Despite mistakes in all of his three games, Almunia was still preferred to the more experienced Jens Lehmann who must have seriously upset his French manager in recent weeks to lose his position as No.1. But there was nothing

Almunia could do about Chelsea's first goal in the 17th minute.

Terry has not only been an outstanding defender and skipper this season, he has also been a goalscoring phenomenon.

So it was no surprise that when the corner was swung in, it was Terry who met it first to glance the ball into the far corner for his sixth goal of the season.

From Arsenal's point of view it was another disastrous goal from a set-piece, and that has been their undoing in recent weeks. Wenger's side tried to

respond to the shock immediately as Ashley Cole rampaged down the left, only for Henry to miss the full-back's cross by the width of a bootlace.

It was a pulsating game that was bound to stir controversy, and that duly arrived in the 28th minute.

The Gunners won a free-kick in dubious circumstances as Robert Pires dived to the floor at the mere threat of a sandwich between Frank Lampard and Claude Makelele.

Formed

Henry placed the ball 30 yards out, and again he proved he was quick-witted enough to ask referee Graham Poll if he could take the kick immediately.

The Chelsea wall was still being formed, and goalkeeper Petr Cech was way out of position on his left-hand post.

The only player in blue who realised what was about to happen was Eidur Gudjohnsen

who was standing in front of the ball and heard Henry's request being granted.

The Icelandic striker tried to make his side aware the kick was bound to stir controversy, and that duly arrived in the 28th minute.

The Gunners won a free-kick in dubious circumstances as Robert Pires dived to the floor at the mere threat of a sandwich between Frank Lampard and Claude Makelele.

Chelsea went mad, and Arjen Robben was booked for his protest, but Mourinho's side only had themselves to blame. Henry simply outwitted them with his 19th goal of the season.

Dider Drogba admitted before this game that he had decided to join Chelsea in the summer from Marseille because Mourinho had told him he could be the new Henry.

But, believe me, Henry is one of a kind, and although this was a draw Drogba is not in the same league as the Gunners' striker. Then again, Arsenal's

defence are not what they were and for a second frustrating time in the game they conceded the lead – and from another set-piece.

Lampard took a free-kick in the first minute of the second half and launched it deep into the Arsenal penalty box.

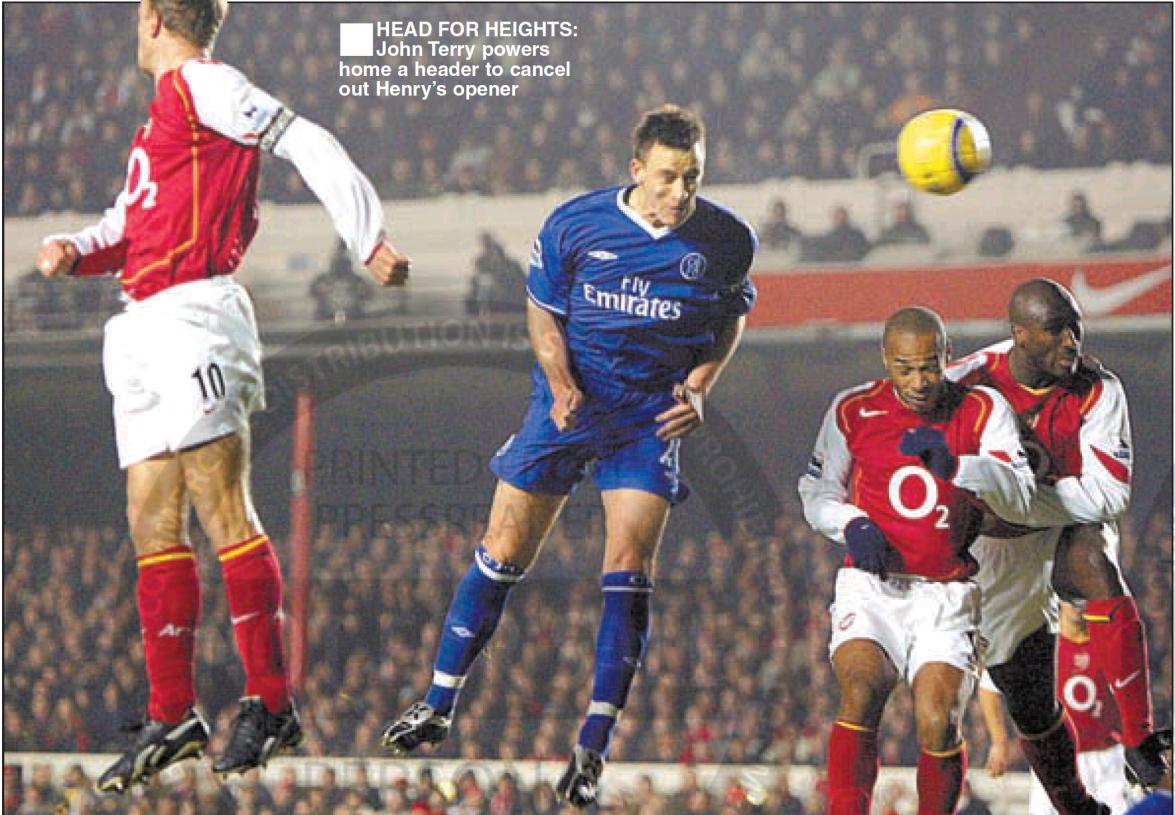
William Gallas headed the ball back towards the penalty spot and Gudjohnsen was there to flick the ball into the top corner.

Summit

On this showing the title race is far from over, especially as Arsenal's outstanding skipper Patrick Vieira was missing.

The Gunners were all over Chelsea in the last 20 minutes as the Premiership leaders ran out of steam.

And if the Gunners can tighten up at the back, they still have the firepower to climb back to the summit of the Premiership table.



HEAD FOR HEIGHTS:
John Terry powers home a header to cancel out Henry's opener

GOALS: 1. Henry (Arsenal) 2. Terry (Chelsea) 3. Duff (Chelsea) 4. Terry (Chelsea)

LENNOX: I'LL KO KLITSCHKO

LENNOX LEWIS is considering a sensational comeback to fight Vitali Klitschko and become heavyweight champion for a fourth time.

Lewis watched Klitschko hammer Danny Williams to defeat in the eighth round on Saturday night and says he could be fit in nine months. The money would have to be astronomical and there

■ from BRIAN WOOLNOUGH in Las Vegas

have been suggestions of a £20m purse to tempt him. Lewis has always said he has quit for good but the rumours will not go away and he wasn't exactly squashing them here.

"Fights like this one and situations like this stir me when I'm watching," he said.

"Vitali Klitschko needs me more than I need him and am I tempted? The answer would have to be yes."

"I am not making any decisions but all I know is I was on the verge of knocking him out when we met and he got stopped because of his cuts."

"Now people are asking who is there

Turn to Page 56



WILLIAMS: Hammered



ARSENAL... 2 CHELSEA... 2



JOSE REFFIN' MAD

Chelsea rage at cheeky Henry

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